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# Biographical Dictionary of the First Generation of Professors at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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**BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY  
OF THE FIRST GENERATION OF PROFESSORS  
AT THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM**

Based on the model of studies carried out at the *Institut d'histoire moderne et contemporaine on the elites* in France, and more specifically on the model of the biographical dictionaries of the professors of the Sorbonne and the Collège de France<sup>1</sup>, we aim at making a biographical dictionary of the professors of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in its first period (1925-1948).

This research complements the works of Israeli researchers who, since the seminar organized by Michael Heyd, Israel Bartal and Shaul Katz in 1991-1992<sup>2</sup>, have started to focus on the history of this institution. This seminar and the works carried out thereafter focus on the discussions which led to the creation of the University and the different conceptions surrounding the role and the definition of what a Jewish university in Jerusalem should be, as well as its history as an institution, including the establishment of its first institutes as well as the history of the disciplines. In the Israeli works, the actors, when they exist, appear only individually or are considered as great figures, but never or rarely in the context of a group.

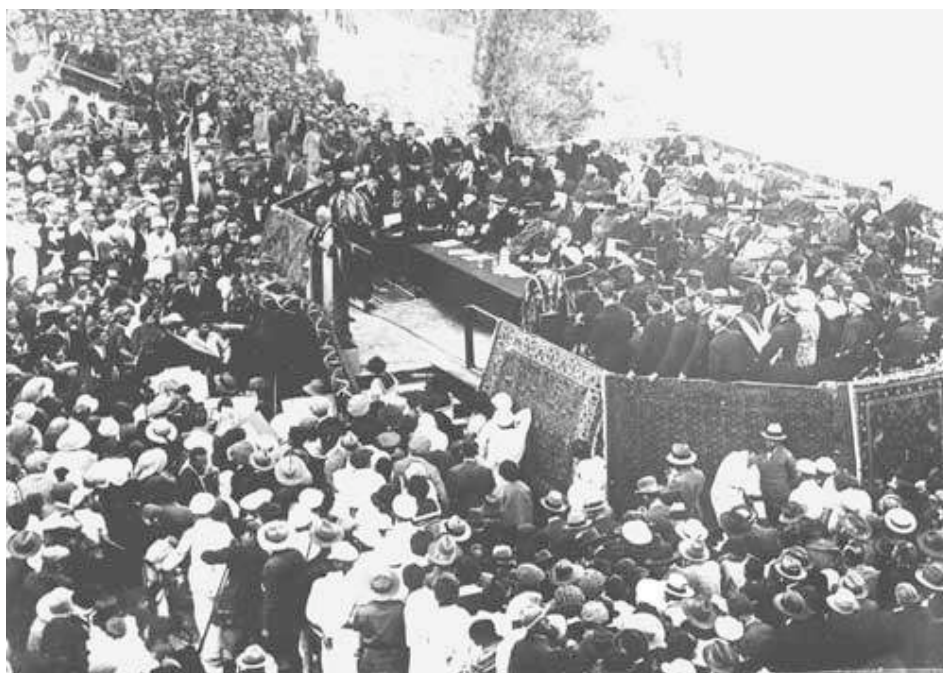
Our work attempts specifically to draw up a collective picture of the people who came to be part of this institution in formation<sup>3</sup>, as well as part of a society itself in formation. Their motivation can be found at times within the more general context of the Zionist dream or, conversely, at other times in that of the one searching for a refuge. This reflects only the problematique of the waves of immigration and the motivations of the immigrants. It is thus interesting to note that numerous Jewish professors from Europe, banned from teaching in their

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<sup>1</sup> See note 3.

<sup>2</sup> This seminar has been published: Shaul Katz, Michael Heyd (eds.), *The History of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Origins and Beginnings*, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> See illustrations



Inauguration of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1925.



The first buildings of the University.



Haim Weizmann and Shaul Adler.

country of origin, have chosen, in the 1930s, to go and settle down somewhere other than in Palestine<sup>4</sup>.

For this research we use the prosopographical method which, by the accumulation and the cross-checking of very specific biographical data on all the elements of a defined population according to common criteria – here the appointment of a chair at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, between 1925 and 1948 – allows for a “photograph” of this social group and sketches up a collective portrait. To the classical fields of the systematic questionnaire applied to French elites, I added features peculiar to this migrant population, such as the Jewish traditional formation, the degree of knowledge of Hebrew (a condition theoretically necessary for being appointed at the University, even if some of them arrive in Palestine without really mastering the language), the circumstances surrounding the installation in Israel, *aliya*<sup>5</sup>. The combined data should allow us to establish a typology of the ensemble of the professors from this first period of the University.

The population studied is constituted of full professors from the establishment of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in 1925, until the creation of the State of Israel. The chronological boundaries of our study correspond to the first period of this institution, comprising the establishment and the initial development – in 1947 the university sets up most of the departments<sup>6</sup>. The operation is inspired then by the model of the German universities.

This period ends up by an abrupt change. This change is caused first of all by the political situation: after the Declaration of Independence and the war which followed, Mount Scopus, where the University was located became an enclave surrounded by the Jordanians, and the University had to be relocated in different buildings in the western part of the city, the professors often offering courses at their own residence. The staff of the University and numerous students commit themselves in the war effort. The University has to close down its activities and the academic year 1948-1949, expected to begin in November 1948, will start only on April 22, 1949. But this abrupt change is caused also by the numerical growth of the University. Finally the change is caused by a switch in orientation, that is, by the progressive switch from the humboldtian model

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<sup>4</sup> The Jewish professors of Germany find refuge in the European or American universities, in Turkey, India or Far-East. Only 9 among them have chosen Palestine between 1930 and 1993.

<sup>5</sup> *Aliya*, term which means “ascent” in Hebrew and represents for a Jew the act of coming to and settling in Palestine and then in Israel. The successive waves of immigration are designated by this term.

<sup>6</sup> The Schools of Medicine and Law have been respectively created in the months of May and November 1949.

which had prevailed so far – which emphasizes research at all levels to the American model – which, conversely, focuses on general knowledge and where specialization and research appear only at the higher level.

The population studied counts the 54 professors appointed between 1925 and 1948: 28 are in the literary and social disciplines and 26 are in the various scientific fields.

This study is based on the examination of the personal files of the professors, stored in the main archives of the University. This source offers a complete documentation for all of the scientific aspects (studies, degrees, career history before and after being appointed at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, recognition of scientific value and integration in the international scientific community assessed by the attribution of awards or any other kind of honor, participation in conferences, memberships in academies or scientific societies). This part of the research has yet to be completed by personal data (date and place of birth, familial origins, occupation of the father, type of studies before college and university studies, data concerning the wife – the University appointing at that time only male professors –, number of children and career of the children, circumstance of the *aliya*, and identity type with, if possible, religious and political orientations). We attempt to determine the implication of each of them in the domains of public life. For these more personal aspects, certain files of the central archives are also very rich (after the War of Independence, when the university recommences its activities, the administration had a questionnaire filled out which was comprised of personal information on the wife, children, parents, brothers and sisters). Nevertheless the ensemble of documents stored in the archives of the university appears to be quite poor in this kind of personal data. In order to get information about these aspects, the option of oral inquiry (interview of widows, children, grand-children or students) happened to be very useful, if not always fruitful.

To illustrate the kind of information gathered on each individual, we offer the example of Professor Shaul Adler, ideal because it allows the presentation of a complete biographical entry. Note that with a certain reservation H. Weizmann writes in a letter dated of 1934: “*The problem with the University is that it has never succeeded, at least in the scientific fields, to attract the services of first quality men, with the exception of Dr. Shaul Adler*”<sup>7</sup>.

**\* Civil status**

ADLER, Shaul Aaron

Born May 17, 1896 in Karelitz (Belorus)

Died January 26, 1966 in Jerusalem, after a long illness

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<sup>7</sup> See illustration

Country of birth Russia, which later became Poland  
British nationality, family settled in Leeds in 1900, when he was 4 years old  
English culture strongly influenced by Judaism

**\* Social Origins**

Father, Sinai, in a family of agnostic tradition

Born in 1871, died in November 1944, in Leeds

Small shopkeeper, settled in Leeds in 1900, where he practiced wholesale trade

Ordained rabbi, without ever officiating, apparently practicing but not believing in his father's religion. Reads the Bible as much as Thomas Moore or Plato. Likes to transmit his knowledge, teaches the Bible and Hebrew always free even if money has often been lacking

Directs a circle of Hebraists, teaches at the Talmud Thora of Leeds, and organizes a cultural meeting of shabbat

His paternal grandfather was Shlomo who smoked on Saturdays but knew how to appreciate a page by Guemara, especially if it was difficult

Mother, Batya Rebecca (Bashi in Yiddish) Yoselevitch, died in 1950 in Leeds

The family lived in a 4 rooms apartment.

**\* Kindred**

The eldest of 9 brothers and sisters (Dora, Sarah, Yankel, Asher, the youngest) of which two passed away at a young age

Two of them experienced an academic career: Solomon became an economist; Marxist believer (who died in China in 1994, at the age of 85), who was offered a post of economic advisor by the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs but refused it. David became a doctor, a lung specialist. Both of them married Christian women

None of them settled in Palestine.

**\* Languages**

Mother tongue, Yiddish; languages spoken at home: English, Hebrew, Yiddish; language of studies: English

Speaks Hebrew fluently, because since his young age his father focused on the knowledge of Hebrew, although he refused to teach it to him and called on a poor man from the community to do so (1901-1903)

**\* Studies**

Goes to the *heder*<sup>8</sup> in Karelitz

1906, grant for study at the central high school of Leeds

Grant for studies in medicine at Leeds University

1912-1917, Leeds University, studies in medicine

1920, Liverpool University, degree of tropical medicine

1917, doctor of medicine, Leeds University

1921, degree in tropical medicine, Liverpool University

**\* Marriage**

Married secretly August 17, 1916 at the city hall of Leeds (and then in 1924, at the synagogue of Leeds) to Sophie Husden, born February 23, 1901 in Manchester (England), died August 30, 1981

Became a nurse after their marriage. During the Second World War, president of the Committee of the Jewish Hospital

Daughter of Asher Sam, tailor, died before her daughter's marriage and Fanny, remarried in Doniger

Family non-practicing

**\* Children**

1) Jonathan, physiology professor at Hadassah (1983) – 1963, assistant; 1968, associate professor –

Born in December 1924 in Jerusalem

Studies of veterinary medicine at Cornell University, USA

Grant of 2,764 pounds from Wellcome Foundation of London for 2 years of study on the anti-estrogen action of plants (1963)

Married to Sarah, a former classmate, who became nurse

Died December 9, 1991

2) Judith, born in 1928 in Jerusalem

Studies in medicine in England, and then biology in Jerusalem

Married a first time in England, she divorced and got remarried April 29, 1956, to Joseph Delcher, son of Rivka and Schmuel

Works at the Department of Biochemistry at McGill while her husband finishes his doctorate

3) Asher, born in November 1930, in Jerusalem

Studies in physics and mathematics in Jerusalem

**\* Date of arrival in Palestine**

1924

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<sup>8</sup> Traditional Jewish primary school.



### **\* Address**

Lives first in the neighborhood of Talpiot, and then in Talbieh. Settles then on Queen Melissande St. (now Queen Helen St.), and finally in 1948, Nebi Samuel St. (opposite Mandelbaum Gate) subsequently he has to leave because it is located on the front line. After living in several apartments in Rehavia, he settles on Hovevei Sion St.

### **\* Circumstance of the *aliya***

- Factors in favor of the *aliya*:  
Zionist, he wishes to live in Eretz-Israel  
Establishment of the Hebrew University
- Organization of the *aliya*  
Plans his *aliya* in 1924. Comes with his wife
- Occupation upon arrival: Lecturer at the Hebrew University
- Previous relations with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: invited by Haim Weizmann in 1923 to join a project at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Invitation accepted in April 1924.

### **\* Type of Jewish identity**

- # Before the arrival in Palestine:
  - From a political standpoint: Zionist
  - From a religious standpoint: he rejected the religious practice of his community, yet still having a profound knowledge of the tradition and an attachment to his ethical values
- # After his arrival in Palestine
  - From a political standpoint: does not belong to any party, rather a pragmatist of the center, he supports Weizmann's positions and then Ben Gurion's  
Nevertheless egalitarian, he manifests a certain sympathy for the Soviet Union in its early years
  - From a religious standpoint: opposed to any established religion. Defines himself as an anticlerical person.

### **\* Career**

- # Before arrival in Palestine
  - 1917-1920, military surgeon, officer of the British Army in Mesopotamia
  - 1921, School of Tropical Medicine in Liverpool
  - 1921-1924, assistant in the Research Laboratory of Sir Alfred Lewis Jones (Sierra Leone)
- # After arrival in Palestine

May 1, 1924, researcher in parasitology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Department of Microbiology

1927, director of the Parasitology Department of the Institute of Microbiology

1928, assistant Professor of Parasitology

August 1929, professor of Parasitology with letters of recommendation from colleagues in Paris, London, and Cambridge

February 1932 Position offered (chemotherapy) at the Medical Council of London with a clearly higher wage. Effective intervention of Magnes to the Committee of Jewish American Doctors who financially support Adler's position in order to augment his salary

July 1944, President of the yet-to be established School of Medicine

Director of the Parasitology Department of the pending School of Medicine and then of the School of Medicine until October 1965

October 1965, retirement

#### **\* Honors**

1933, Chalmers Golden Medal of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, London

1933, Laveran Medal of the French Society of Exotic Pathology, Member of the Society of Pathology of Great-Britain and Ireland, Correspondent Member of the French Society of Tropical Pathology

1946, winner of the price of the Friends of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in England

1949, Haim Weizmann Prize

June 1946, decorated in the Order of the British Empire

1951, Zimmermann Prize for Agricultural Cooperative

April 1957, member of the Royal Society (first Israeli elected)

1957, Israel Prize for the medical sciences

1958, member of the Royal College of Doctors, London, Member of the Central Committee of Research of the World Health Organization

1959, participant in a conference in Brazil celebrating the 50th anniversary of the discovery of Chagas Disease

1960, participant in the ceremony of the 300th Anniversary of the Royal Society where he represents Israel

1962, Zvi Rosenfeld Prize of the Israel Medical Association, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its foundation

October 28, 1962, Tchernikowsky Prize from the city of Tel-Aviv for his translation in Hebrew of On the Origin of Species

1963, member of the Committee of the Research Council of the World Health Organization

1963, travel to Brazil. Attend the 7th International Conference on Tropical Disease and Malaria, Rio de Janeiro  
 1964, doctor honoris causa from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem  
 May 1965, doctor honoris causa from Leeds University  
 1965, member of the World Health Organization  
 1966, Solomon Bublick Prize, of posthumous nature, yet he was informed of it the morning of his passing  
 1968, Department of Parasitology named Adler with an annual fellowship offered by the Union of Jewish Women in South Africa

**\* Other activities**

# Scientific (attending international conferences, invitations to teach courses abroad, trips for study, advising, etc...)  
 1920, five week trip to India  
 1928, mission in Mesopotamia with Professor Theodor: research on the leishmaniasis  
 April-October 1930, head of the expedition on the Kala Azar for the Royal Society and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, with Oscar Theodor. President of the Commission on the Kala Azar of the Royal Society  
 April-October 1931, new expedition for the Commission on the Kala Azar  
 1930s, voluntary advisor at the Parasitology Department of Hadassah  
 August 1934, Conference on the Kala Azar in Italy at the League of the Nations  
 April 1938, International Conference on Tropical Medicine  
 1938, Conference at Tulane University (USA)  
 1939, Conference on Microbiology, USA  
 1946, trip to Leeds  
 Spring 1947, trips to the United States and to England  
 April 1948, represents the new State of Israel at the Fourth International Conference of Tropical Medicine, Washington D.C.  
 1950s, member of the Executive Committee of the Weizmann Institute of Sciences  
 Member of the Council of the Institute of Agriculture  
 Member of the Israel Council of Research  
 Advisor at the National Institute of Health, USA  
 Trips to Turkey, Kenya and South Africa  
 April-May 9, 1958, trip to Australia and New-Zeland, invited by the Jewish Medical Association and the Royal Australian Medical Society for a series of twelve talks on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the State of Israel  
 1959, Conference in Argentina and Chile

196, 7th International Conference on Tropical Disease and Malaria, Rio de Janeiro

1964, member of the Consultative Committee and the Council of Medical Research of the World Health Organization

1964, trip to China, invited by the School of Medicine of the Chinese Academy of Sciences

Also trips to Peru, Chile and Panama

# Military, political, others (advising, etc...), personal

Enrolled in the British Army, while carrying on his study of medicine: training as an officer with the certitude of never being charged to duty. Sent to Sierra Leone, and then to Iraq, where he faces for the first time the leishmaniasis. Surgeon of brigade in a unit of heavy artillery. Serves in an Indian hospital in Mesopotamia. Released in 1920.

During the Second World War, gives intensive courses in tropical medicine to allied military doctors

#### **\* Networks**

# Network of colleagues

Works in collaboration with Oscar Theodor, who is associated with the works of the Commission on the Kala Azar. Then an incident provokes a falling out between them

Friend of Haim Sheba

# Other networks

Friend of the bookseller Michel Rabinovich, self-taught person, coming from an orthodox family; friend of his colleague, the chemist Mosche Weizmann, with whom he plays chess; friend of the business man Manahem Weitz, an importer

#### **\* Relations with the international scientific community**

Israel Wechsler, director of the Neurology Department of Mount Sinai Hospital in New York

#### **\* Character and interests**

Play football for the Maccabi Jerusalem

Lover of chess and math

**\* Bibliography** (main works and international collaborations, publications in international journals)

Works on the fight against theileriosis, malaria and leishmaniasis

His works also have allowed the establishment of a dairy industry in Palestine

Publications in *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Medicine*; *Annals of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology*; *Nature*

\* **Sources** Central Archives, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Correspondence with J. Adler

R. Ashbel *As much as we could do, Jerusalem, Mount Scopus, Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1989*

Daniel Gavron, *Saul Adler, pioneer of tropical medicine. A biography*, Balaban Publisher, Rehovot, 1997

This biographical dictionary is a research tool for social history. Its individual entries of information provide so many elements of social history which allow for the understanding of the formation of an Israeli elite, to draw conclusions on his social origins, on his intellectual role and on the factors favorable to placement in a social group. The ensemble should allow one to answer a certain number of questions.

Thus it will be interesting to know the percentage of the next generations of professors at the Hebrew University who have followed a traditional Jewish education (including studies at the *heder* and eventually at the *yeshiva*<sup>9</sup>) and if, besides those who have carried on in this track until rabbinical studies, this training had implications on the choice of their discipline of predilection: yielding an orientation toward literary or scientific disciplines. Moreover, it should be possible to analyze how this elite was constructed, to determine its role in the society of the *Yshouv*<sup>10</sup>; and, by comparison with other populations, to consider its evolution in the Israeli society. The cross-checking of the data allows one to draw a portrait of this group and to assess its importance in the surrounding society. Moreover it will be possible to compare the demographic behavior of this Jewish population with others, e.g. Christian. Finally, it will be possible to illuminate the profile of the career of these professors: minimum training for recruitment at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, history of career, age for full professorship, duration of career.

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CRFJ

Translation: C. and K. Delage

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<sup>9</sup> Traditional talmudic school.

<sup>10</sup> Jewish society in the Palestine of the period before 1948.